RAOK: Neighbor clears the driveway of snow

Becky Fortier will be eating at Cork and More soon because of her kindness and the gourmet food store's generosity.



Becky, without being asked, cleared a friend's driveway of snow this weekend while one half of the couple was at work and the other was inside with a broken ankle.

Random Acts of Kindness is the monthlong promotion *Lake Tahoe News* is putting forth to bring more kindness to the basin, even the world. The idea is to do something nice for someone else, or to recognize a nice thing done to you, or one you see.

Now, all you have to do is write about the kindness. At the end of the story, tell us about the kindness you have been a witness to, did or received.

There are a few rules associated with Random Acts of Kindness. If you want to read them, check out this story.

School districts struggle to comply with Voters Rights Act

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Unified School District may be in violation of the California Voters Rights Act based on how board members are elected.

While the CVRA was enacted in 2002, the 2010 Census is forcing all elected bodies to look at how people get into office and if constituents are fairly represented. The federal Voting Rights Act also plays a role.



Lake Tahoe Unified School District board members are expected to discuss the issue Feb. 14. LTUSD first broached the subject in January 2011. It's expected to be an agenda item several times this year for LTUSD and Lake Tahoe Community College as they work through the process before their next board elections in 2013.

Lake Tahoe Community College board discussed the issue in October and December.

"The first step would be for the board to determine if it is in the best interest of the district to conduct a study to ensure compliance with the California and federal Voting Rights Acts," Angie Keil, spokeswoman for LTUSD, wrote in an email to *Lake Tahoe News*.

Public hearings and approval from the county office of education are also required.

Earlier this month in a letter from attorney David Girard to El Dorado County Office of Education Superintendent Vicki Barber it says LTUSD is at-risk of violating the CVRA.

LTUSD had district elections when it first formed in 1950 until the mid-1960s. Each of the five board members represented a district. For history buffs, here is a list of LTUSD board members through the years.

South Lake Tahoe staff is aware of the CVRA, but the council has not discussed the issue in open or closed session.

“They have to make the argument we have a racially polarized electorate. I don’t believe our town is racially polarized,” Nancy Kerry, spokeswoman for South Lake Tahoe, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Changing from at-large elections to district could have the unintended consequence of creating polarization.

To date, no complaints have been filed with the city, LTUSD or LTCC regarding representation to their boards.

“When you go to area elections in a small community like ours, sometimes you can’t get people to run. You are diluting down the voting base to an even smaller voting base. That is a concern for me,” LTCC President Kindred Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*.

As it stands now for LTCC, LTUSD and South Lake Tahoe, the five members of each board could live on the same street. Everyone in the respective jurisdictions votes for all five electeds.

Changing to district elections would mean dividing the jurisdictions into five areas and one person would be elected from each area.

With LTUSD being further along in the study process, LTCC may be able to piggyback on the research the K-12 district has done and might do. Otherwise, it could cost LTCC $35,000 to conduct a study to determine if it should change how board members are elected.

“The board wants to make sure we are not creating racial polarization. We want to make sure everyone has a voice per the California Voting Rights Act,” Murillo said.

Besides wanting to do the right thing, districts also don’t

want to be sued. CVRA lawsuits have cost school districts hundreds of thousands of dollars. Madera Unified's bill was $1.2 million.

Some have equated the people going after the schools to the man who goes around suing businesses for questionable ADA violations. In other words, it's about attorneys making a buck and not the greater good of the public.

If an entity is sued under the CVRA, successful plaintiffs can recover all legal costs.

"In order to be successful, the plaintiffs must only prove that racially polarized voting exists and that the subgroup could influence elections under a different system," Redistricting Partners of Sacramento said in its analysis that was presented to the LTCC board in December.

Paul Mitchell with Redistricting Partners at the Dec. 13 meeting told the board, "It's not clear you have racially polarized voting."

He said of the college district's population of 29,839, 25 percent are Latino and 63 percent are non-Hispanic white. The bulk of the Latinos live in a concentrated area. That could be the problem under the CVRA.

With about 90 percent of districts in California having at-large elections – like LTUSD and LTCC – many could be vulnerable to a lawsuit.

In Douglas County, the school board was presented with three redistricting options at its meeting this month. It was agreed the structure now in place that gives Lake Tahoe a representative to the seven-member board would remain. The board member has to live in the area she or he represents.

"There was some discussion if trends don't shift, this may be the last time the board can justify an exclusive lake zone,"

Superintendent Lisa Noonan told *Lake Tahoe News*.

First Tahoe storm tests snowshoe agility during cocktail races

By Dan Tirabasso

CAMP RICHARDSON – The snow has fallen and Lake Tahoe is officially open for business, but snowsports are not confined to the ski slopes. This was evident during the Snowshoe Cocktail Races at the Beacon restaurant Saturday night.

The lolling barroom chatter flourished into a clamor of snow boots and laughter as the young crowd trickled in, sporting everything from bright red ski masks to robes.



Gina Craig, right, and

Stephanie Meyers at the Jan. 21 cocktail snowshoe cocktail races at the Beacon. Photo/Geno Fonderoli

Lack of snow forced the cancellation of the December race, but Mother Nature came through for the Jan. 21 event.

There were mens and women's competitions that consisted of obstacle and sprint races; with seven men and six women competing. The four-man relay race was canceled due to a low turnout.

The rules were simple, strap on snowshoes, balance a tray of drinks in one hand, and make it to the finish line without spilling all the drinks.

"It's a great atmosphere," Tahoe local Amber Pass said. "A great event with good prizes and good cocktails."

Boisterous observers lined the deck overlooking the snow-covered beach, so brightly lighted the calm lake and the cloudy night sky seemed to merge into solid black.

The crowd cheered as contestants attempted to shuffle and gallop their way through the races.

In the first round, a woman hit by a snowball missed an obstacle, and in the disorientation that ensued she turned tail and began to traverse through the obstacle course backward. The officials declared a redo.

The rest of the competition went smoothly thanks to enthusiastic mediation of snowboard emcee and self-proclaimed

hype man David Hunt who kept the contest rolling and the crowd smiling.

Prizes ranging from new snowboards to ski passes were awarded for first, second, and third place. But given the lack of contestants it seemed more like a giveaway than a prize.

The Beacon's next Snowshoe Cocktail Races are Feb. 18 and March 10, 7pm.

Americans dominate World Cup snowboardcross

By U.S. Snowboarding News Bureau

VEYSONNAZ, Switzerland – It was a sweep for U.S. Snowboarding Sunday with Lindsey Jacobellis of Stratton Mountain, Vt., and teammate Nate Holland of Squaw Valley winning at the Veysonnaz World Cup.

Jacobellis continued on a roll with her third straight win of the season to remain undefeated starting with her victory in the USANA Snowboardcross Cup at Telluride last month. The tour now swings back to the United States for next weekend's X Games in Aspen.

Holland now leads the pack in the World Cup snowboardcross

rankings; his first win since last season's event in Lech. He took the win in a photo finish – a mere half board length ahead of Swiss Markus Schairer.

"I knew I was riding well on this course. I love this course, like I said I love the speed," Holland said.

California's economy showing signs of recovery

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

The evidence keeps accumulating: California's economic recovery is gathering momentum. It's just nowhere near a boom yet.

Unemployment in California fell two-tenths of a point last month to 11.1 percent, the lowest level in nearly three years, the Employment Development Department reported Friday. Payrolls expanded for the sixth straight month, and economists pronounced themselves satisfied that the state is finally on the right track.

"We have sort of a nice string going," said Howard Roth, chief economist at the state Department of Finance. "This makes me more confident that it's not going to go away. … I think it's the real thing."

The growth in payroll jobs, which is considered the most reliable barometer of the job market, was a fairly weak 10,700

in December. That was offset somewhat by news that November’s job growth was revised upward sharply.

Overall, Roth said, the results show the economy is mending but not operating at full throttle. “It’s got to get a lot faster than this,” he said. “But it looks like it has a good foundation.”

Read the whole story

History of Paiute Indian to be retold

Dianna Borges, South Shore speaker-actor, presents a re-enactment of Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, a Paiute Native American, on Jan. 25 at 6pm.

Hear Sarah’s story at Explore Tahoe: An Urban Trailhead located at 4114 Lake Tahoe Blvd. near the Heavenly Village.

A $5 donation is requested. A $5 flat rate offered in the Heavenly Village Parking Contact Explore Tahoe at (530) 542.4637 for more information.

Price of first class stamp

increases 1 cent

By Ed O’Keefe, Washington Post

Postage rates jumped Sunday for the first time in two-and-a-half years as the U.S. Postal Service hopes to generate more revenue amid historic losses.

First-class postage stamps now cost 45 cents each, a price jump that officials anticipate will generate an additional $888 million in annual revenue. The rate increase does not affect the use of Forever stamps purchased before Sunday.

The price hike comes as negotiations between the U.S. Postal Service and two of its labor unions reached an impasse that may eventually require a ruling by an arbitrator.

Postal and union officials announced late Friday that separate talks had collapsed between USPS and the National Association of Letter Carriers and the National Postal Mail Handlers Union. Contracts with both unions, which represent a combined 242,000 postal workers, expired in late November. Negotiations were extended twice before failing Friday.

Read the whole story

Judge hears arguments in sealing forest fire documents case

By Denny Walsh, Sacramento Bee

A Sacramento federal judge heard arguments Thursday and will rule later on The Bee's objections to sealing documents that allegedly contain evidence of misconduct and fraud on the part of U.S. Forest Service employees.

Timber giant Sierra Pacific Industries submitted the documents in partial support of its motion for summary judgment in the company's lawsuit contesting the government's refusal to let Forest Service employees testify in related state court litigation.

A bitter legal struggle between the United States and Sierra Pacific grew out of a mammoth wildfire in 2007 that devoured 65,000 acres in Plumas and Lassen counties.

Much of the damage was in two national forests, and the government sued Sierra Pacific, claiming the fire started when a bulldozer belonging to a contractor working for the company struck a rock.

Read the whole story

Liberty Energy in process of changing name, rebranding

Liberty Energy is making some changes that are cosmetic in many ways.

The electricity provider for the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin and into Alpine County is changing its name to Liberty Utilities. This is to reflect the parent company based in Canada acquiring companies throughout the United States –

including hydroelectric and natural gas firms.

The roll out of the new name, website and other branding components is expected in March.

Bob Dodds has left the company. The president is now Mike Smart.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Gondola between Ridge-Heavenly set to begin running

People riding the new gondola between Ridge Tahoe and Heavenly Mountain Resort can relax a bit. Personnel from the Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District were trained on rescue operations on Friday – just in case an emergency ever arises.

The gondola car, which originally was scheduled to begin operation in December, will be running this week.



Tahoe Douglas firefighters train on The Ridge's

gondola Jan.
20.
Photo/Cathleen
Allison/Nevada
Photo Source

Employees with Hilltrac, manufacturers of the people mover, were on hand Jan. 20 to help with the training.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report